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ABSTRACT

This document presents an overview of the design and implementation stages of a Spencerport (New York) project, designed to improve the educational program and student learning in each building in the district. The first section describes the project's goal for each building, which is that (1) 95 (or greater) percent of all students should demonstrate minimum academic mastery; (2) there shall be no significant difference in the proportion of students demonstrating minimum academic mastery as a function of socioeconomic class; and (3) the above two conditions shall have been obtained for a minimum of three consecutive years. Subsequent sections identify (1) the project's interim and concomitant goals; (2) a number of assumptions upon which effective schools/teaching rest; (3) characteristics of an effective school; and (4) the functions of each school's planning committee. The overview contains a flowchart, which shows the steps which were followed in developing the project and the steps in the annual cycle of the project at the building level. The final section contains statistical data taken from the Third Annual Evaluation Report, indicating the continued effectiveness of the project. (IW)

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SPENCERPORT CENTRAL SCHOOLS
Spencerport, New York

FOURTH OVERVIEW OF THE MORE EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS/TEACHING PROJECT
October 1986

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Since 1982-83 the Spencerport Central School District has been conducting a unique project designed to improve the educational program and student learning in each building of the district. We are attempting to see if the effective school research, which was originally conducted in urban elementary schools, is applicable at all levels of a suburban K-12 school system. Spencerport is the first suburban district in the nation to examine this issue in all buildings throughout the district.

Project Goal

The project's goal for each building in the district is:

A. Ninety-five, or greater, percent of all the students at each grade level should demonstrate minimum academic mastery. Students who achieve minimum academic mastery have been prepared so that they will be predictably successful in the next grade in either their own school district or in any other school district throughout the nation. Minimum academic mastery is measured by performance on a standardized achievement test (preferably criterion-referenced, otherwise norm-referenced).

B. There shall be no significant difference in the proportion of youth demonstrating minimum academic mastery as a function of socioeconomic class.

C. The above two conditions shall have been obtained for a minimum of three consecutive years.

This goal can be illustrated as follows:

	Low Socioeconomic Classes	Middle & Upper Socioeconomic Classes
At or above minimum academic mastery	≥ 95%	≥ 95%
Below minimum academic	≤ 5%	≤ 5%

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Two phrases need to be defined in order to understand the project's goal. They are:

A. Minimum Academic Mastery--Students who achieve this have been prepared so that they will be predictably successful in the next grade either in this or in any other school district throughout the nation. Minimum academic mastery shall be measured by performance on a standardized achievement (norm or criterion referenced) test. The cut-off point between minimum and unsuccessful academic mastery shall be established in advance.

B. Socio-economic class is determined by the number of years of formal education which the mother of a child has. If the level of the mother's formal education is not available, then the level of the father's formal education will be used. Should a child not be living with his or her parents, then the number of years of formal education which the female (or the male) has in the household in which the child is residing shall be used.

Interim Project Goal

Should a school building not be effective according to the above goal then the following criteria for school improvement are used until a building becomes effective:

A. There shall be an annual increase in the proportion of students who demonstrate minimum academic mastery,

and

B. There shall be an annual decrease in the proportion of youth demonstrating minimum academic mastery as a function of socio-economic class.

Concomitant Goal

In addition to its main goal, the project also has a Concomitant Goal. It is: the number of students with outstanding achievement will rise.

1. There shall be an annual evaluation of the percentage of students scoring in stanines seven, eight and nine on the Stanford Achievement Test in Reading Comprehension and Total Mathematics or of the percentage of students scoring at or above 90% on a Regents examination.

2. For those subjects in which a significant proportion of the students take a Regents exam,

   a. There will be an annual increase in the percentage of students scoring 65% or higher, and

   b. There will be an annual increase in the percentage of students taking the exam.

Assumptions

The effective schools/teaching literature and the district's consultants (Lawrence Lezotte and, until his death, Ronald Edmonds) identified a number of assumptions upon which effective schools/teaching rest. These assumptions were identified and accepted as a formal part of this project.

1. Virtually all students are educable when educability is defined as pupil acquisition of basic school skills.

2. Research concludes that the school effects are more powerful than familial effects. This conclusion must not be taken to mean there is no familial effect in pupil acquisition of academic skills. In some families, background does not limit a student's ability to acquire basic school skills; but some families can enhance student achievement well beyond basic school skills.

3. a. Annually the goal of education for each youth is to bring him or her to at least the standard minimum academic performance for that grade level so that he or she can perform successfully in the next grade level.

   b. Further, the goal of education is to prepare students so that they can make as many choices as possible. Thus upon graduation from high school all students should be able, as a result of their education, to choose whether or not to enter college, or to attend another form of post high school education, or to obtain a job.

4. There is a positive correlation between academic student achievement and staff expectations.

5. An emphasis upon learning, upon academic achievement, is prime purpose of public education.

6. Teachers and principals can and do make a key difference in the quality of education each child receives.

7. A school building is a complex social system with a set of norms, beliefs and patterns of behavior which can facilitate or hinder learning.

8. Collaborative, cooperative, collegial, supportive, non-coercive planning especially at the building level and accompanied by support from District Office personnel is the key approach to improvement.

9. The building principal has a key role in establishing the climate of his or her building.

10. Change is a process, a series of related events. It is not one event.

11. Ideal change fosters ownership and commitment by all participants.

12. In many ways, the schools in this district are effective. The challenge is to make them more effective.

13. This project affects all school personnel.

14. Because the climate of a school is dependent upon all of its occupants, the individual school building as a whole is the strategic unit for planned change. To obtain change, attention must be paid to the culture of the school; focusing on the behavior of individual teachers or students is not sufficient.

15. Focusing on effective schools research may necessitate realignment of other priorities within the building.

Characteristics of an Effective School

Basically an effective schools project attempts to improve student achievement by causing the correlates, or characteristics, of an effective school to come into place in each building. (Because correlational statistics were used in the original research, no correlate can be assumed to be more important than another. All must be present.) These correlates are:

*Safe and Orderly Environment

There is an orderly purposeful atmosphere which is free from the threat of physical harm for both students and staff. However, the atmosphere is not oppressive and is conducive to teaching and learning.

*Clear School Mission

There is a clearly-articulated mission for the school through which the staff shares an understanding of and a commitment to instructional goals, priorities, assessment procedures and accountability.

*Instructional Leadership

The principal acts as the instructional leader who effectively communicates the mission of the school to the staff, parents and students and who understands and applies the characteristics of instructional effectiveness in the management of the instructional program of the school.

°High Expectations

The school displays a climate of expectation in which the staff believes and demonstrates that students can attain mastery of basic skills and that they (the staff) have the capability to help students achieve such mastery.

°Opportunity to Learn and Student Time on Task

Teachers allocate a significant amount of classroom time to instruction in basic skill areas. For a high percentage of that allocated time students are engaged in planned learning activities directly related to identified objectives.

°Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress

Feedback on student academic progress is frequently obtained. Multiple assessment methods such as teacher-made tests, samples of students' work, mastery skills checklists, criterion-referenced tests and norm-referenced tests are used. The results of testing are used to improve individual student performance and also to improve the instructional program.

°Home-School Relations

Parents understand and support the basic mission of the school and are made to feel that they have an important role in achieving this mission.

Note: Research on this "quasi" correlate is mixed; it was present in only 50% of the effective schools. Lawrence Lezotte, one of the most respected effective school researchers, wrote: "All school improvement programs should allow for and aggressively pursue high levels of parent involvement. On the other hand no school faculty can avoid a responsibility to be effective or improve because parents are unable or unwilling to be actively involved."

Building Planning Committee

Absolutely essential to a more effective schools/teaching project is the formation and operation of a Planning Committee in each school. Its functions are:

1. To develop a plan for the building based upon the needs assessment data. This plan shall emphasize strengths and areas of needed improvement.

2. To identify and agree upon the most important needs and subsequent objectives.

3. To share this plan of action with the total faculty for the purposes of study, discussion and change before adopting a final plan of action by October 1.

4. To establish specific vehicles for both formal and informal ongoing communication with the faculty so that its deliberations are, and are perceived as, open.

5. To establish regular opportunities for input and review throughout the school year.

6. To meet periodically throughout the year to monitor and to facilitate the implementation of the plan.

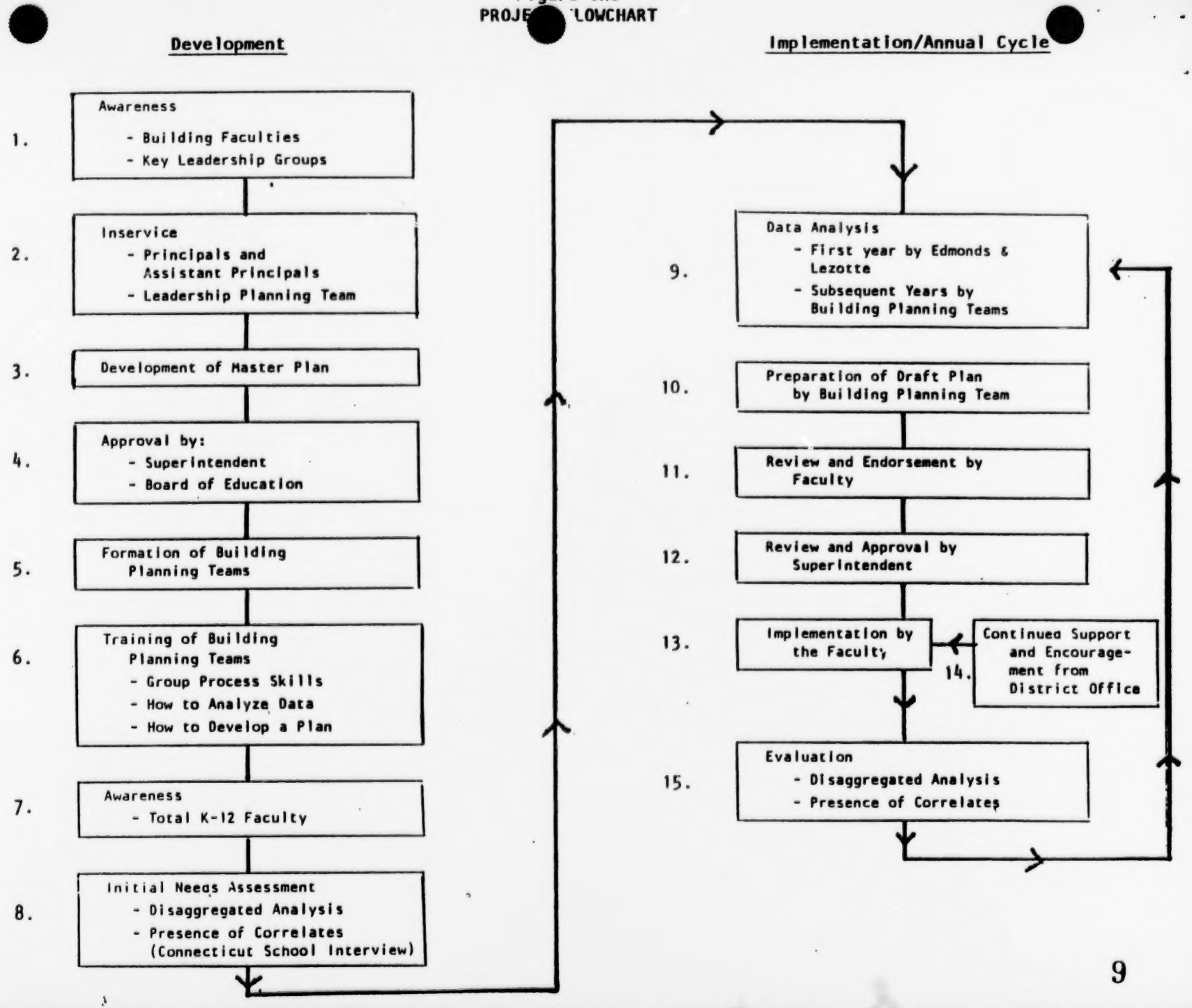
7. To prepare a new plan for the second and future years based upon the annual evaluation of the building plan.

The Building Planning Committee is composed of the principal and five to seven teachers who are respected by their colleagues and broadly representative of the faculty.

Project Flow Chart

The following flow chart shows the steps which were followed in developing the project and the steps in the annual cycle of the project at the building level:

Figure One
PROJECT FLOWCHART


Development
Implementation/Annual Cycle
1. Awareness
- Building Faculties
- Key Leadership Groups
2. Inservice
- Principals and Assistant Principals
- Leadership Planning Team
3. Development of Master Plan
4. Approval by:
- Superintendent
- Board of Education
5. Formation of Building Planning Teams
6. Training of Building Planning Teams
- Group Process Skills
- How to Analyze Data
- How to Develop a Plan
7. Awareness
- Total K-12 Faculty
8. Initial Needs Assessment
- Disaggregated Analysis
- Presence of Correlates (Connecticut School Interview)
9. Data Analysis
- First year by Edmonds & Lezotte
- Subsequent Years by Building Planning Teams
10. Preparation of Draft Plan by Building Planning Team
11. Review and Endorsement by Faculty
12. Review and Approval by Superintendent
13. Implementation by the Faculty
14. Continued Support and Encouragement from District Office
15. Evaluation
- Disaggregated Analysis
- Presence of Correlates

Evaluation

Annual written reports of the project's progress in improving the education of all children in the district are prepared each fall. These reports summarize data pertaining to:

a. The degree to which the correlates of an effective school are present in each building.

b. Improvement in student achievement. More specifically this information is analyzed in terms of the disaggregated analysis of student achievement set forth on the first page of the overview.

Excerpts from the Third Annual Evaluation Report follow:

Number of Correlates in Place in Each Building

	Bernabi	Munn	Town Line	Cosgrove	Wilson	Total	Possible
May 1983	1		2			3	35
May 1984	5	2	3			10	35
May 1985	5	3	5	2	3	18	35
May 1986	7	5	5	2	5	24	35

Percent of Students Scoring At or Above
the 40th Percentile on the
Stanford Achievement Test

A. Reading Comprehension

	82-83	83-84	84-85	85-86
Bernabi	87%	90%	91%	92%
Munn	74	81	79	87
Town Line	77	80	85	89
Cosgrove	71	76	78	83

B. Total Math

	82-83	83-84	84-85	85-86
Bernabi	89%	91%	93%	97%
Munn	87	84	90	88
Town Line	88	83	88	92
Cosgrove	79	85	89	88

Percentage of Students Scoring in
Stanines 7 - 8 - 9

A. Reading

	82-83	83-84	84-85	85-86
Bernabi	49%	47%	49%	47%
Munn	30	34	36	39
Town Line	43	46	48	45
Cosgrove	34	27	32	34

B. Mathematics

	82-83	83-84	84-85	85-86
Bernabi	57%	55%	62%	69%
Munn	50	49	55	56
Town Line	49	53	51	57
Cosgrove	31	36	34	45

National Average - 23%

Regents Examination Data

A. Social Studies

	Percent Taking	Percent Passing	% Scoring 90-100%
June 1983	61%	89%	9%
June 1984	60	92	14
June 1985	74	95	15
June 1986	78	86	11

For New York State the average percent passing is 78%.

B. English

	Percent Taking	Percent Passing	% Scoring 90-100%
June 1983	53%	95%	7%
June 1984	59	96	7
June 1985	60	97	8
Class of 1986	94	85	7

For New York State the average percent passing is 85%.

Conclusions

1. Satisfactory progress is occurring in installing the correlates of an effective school in each building.

2. The project's goal is that 95% of all students regardless of background will attain at least minimal academic mastery. Progress is occurring in meeting this goal. The percentage of students attaining at least minimal academic mastery ranges from 72% to 100%.

3. Unusually high proportions of students attain scores indicating outstanding achievement. Twenty-four to fifty-seven percent attain scores in the top three stanines on the Stanford Achievement Test. Even so, progress is occurring in further improving these scores, thus meeting the project's Concomitant Goal.